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PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

By

ALFRED KREYMBORG

=

Author of "Mushrooms"

THE OTHER PRESS

Seventeen East Fourteenth Street

NEW YORK

1918

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TO MY LASS AND LAD:
LOUISE NASHER
AND
HERMANN KREYMBORG

Plays for Poem-Mimes might be defined as pantomime acting or dancing of folk or automatons to an accompaniment of rhythmic lines, in place of music. In view of the fact that in all these experiments the characters speak (with the exception of the children in *When The Willow Nods*, the wife in *Jack's House*, and the shadows in *Blue and Green*), little more than a semi-dance of gesture can be added by them to their delivery of the lines, but free dancing might be indulged during the interludes of silence. It is imperative that the reading tempo and the introduction of pantomiming shall adhere to the sense connotation rather than the rhythm of the lines. I have to make this small excursion into the realm of professorial instruction because the good people who have been kind as well as the good people who have been unkind to what is commonly and erroneously termed, free verse, have slipped into the error of scanning rather than of feeling the line divisions I offered in *Mushrooms*. If homogeneity of some sort exists in the present experiments, possibly it runs through the general undercurrent which carries words, silences and pantomiming along, the musician's term for which is organ-point. I duly urge my apology for these ejaculations—especially as that benign entity, contradiction between an author's preface and production, is certain to come between us.

A. K.

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WHEN THE WILLOW NODS
(A Dance-Play)

WHEN THE WILLOW NODS

A DANCE-PLAY

(A dense wood of indiscriminate trees builds a careless wall around a willow leaning over a suggestion of pond. Sun splotches belie the illusion that the time of day is dusk. An old figure, seated on a low stone ledge. His attire might rouse the inference that he believes simplicity to be the denouement of all complexities. He speaks with a detached air in a rubato tempo, like one who improvises, and occasionally caresses a small hidden instrument or drum with exquisite, haphazard rhythms. Varying intervals of silence break his speech. A girl and a boy; and later, a second boy. With them simplicity is doubtless the beginning of all things. The girl and boys do not speak, but act the improvisation of the figure in a dance or pantomime which discloses a series of unconscious poses, naïve, awkward, uncertain, shy. They appear to be the physical embodiment of the thought-play of the figure. He is unseen by them, but it is evident that they can hear him, most of the time, separately. It is questionable whether the figure can see them. At the rise of the curtain, the figure is alone, and begins:)

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

Only when the willow nods
does the water nod ;
only when the wind nods
does the willow nod ;
only when a cloud nods
does the wind nod ;
and, of course, nod
rhymes with God. . . .

(The girl wanders in; looks up at the willow; approaches the water; kneels.)

Better
that you look
lovely
than that you are
lovely—
yes,
oh yes,
touch your blouse, touch your hair,
when he comes,
touch your cheeks
with the pink that flies;
but his glance
will do more
for your look
than these. . . .

(Indefinite poses of self-contemplation. The first boy wanders in, left, carrying a small basket.)

Your least, sly look
recreates folk
to your image.

WHEN THE WILLOW NODS

Not that they know what your image is,
nor that they care—but—
won't you look at him?
He'd like to look like you—
then you'll love him? . . .

*(Rapture holds the boy; he sets the basket on the
ground. The girl stiffens into another pose.)*

She has made cups
of her hands.
She holds them,
palms waiting,
under her breasts.
If you look still higher
you may see
three more cups—
her mouth,
her eyes.
And there is a cup
you cannot see.
Brave lad,
can you resist so many? . . .

*(The boy's ecstasy crumbles to excitement, as the
girl looks at him vaguely.)*

What can you—
what should you—
what shall you say—
so—
so only—
so only she'll—
what can you—

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

what should you—
what shall you swear?
Could I
let you give her—
the earth,
or a tree—
lend you
something
more than you,
more than me—
how can you—
how should you—
how else could you
make her—
urge her to—
have her say,
whisper,
breathe—
breathe she—
breathe that she—
what can you—
what should you—
what shall you do?
You might—
jump—
jump off—
and never come back!
And she—
she only—
she only say—

WHEN THE WILLOW NODS

no! . . .

(The girl looks at the boy clearly. She moves from the water. He follows. She stops beyond the willow. He hesitates.)

Do you feel him
a thing of silk—
now you can hear him?
Must you be always
tearing his flesh—
with your eyes, and your silence?
Put a quick finger
on one of his pores—
touch it at least—
or he will fall,
bloodless,
at your feet—
and leave you nobody.
You wouldn't enjoy
turning ghoul?
Faun girl,
you are beautiful—
be kind
to yourself. . . .

(The girl starts towards the boy; permits him gradually and gently to caress her.)

Place your cool mouth
to his.
Press hard and long.
There will come opening

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

and things
which have never sung before.
Things even you
will never understand. Nor he.
Turn your large eyes
to his.
Enter.

You will see
what you heard—
and the mystery grow.
At the last,
bring your curious touch
to his.

Hands
move to the breeze. . . .

(Frightened, the girl draws away; she suddenly disappears. Awed, the boy cannot follow her.)

She loves you?
And who are you—
who are you that she should?
Don't ask me that—
ask tiny questions.
She of the yellow hair,
she of the cool green eyes,
she of the queer red mouth—
I know whom you mean.
Come, lad.
Tell me more about her.
Don't be afraid.
She loves you?

WHEN THE WILLOW NODS

So you said . . .
Let's sit on the grass.
It gives so pleasantly.
Now we can talk.
She loves you?
But let's talk, talk about her!
You can't?
Neither can I . . .
Away,
away from this place—
there's a pond past these trees—
let's steal to a boat,
a long eerie boat,
and drift to the water lilies—
pink, blue or white,
lilies are quiet thoughts.
We won't break them for her.
We don't have to . . .
Eh?
She loves you?
Poor boy,
are you so happy you're sad?
That's right,
shut your eyes.
Wake you
when we reach the lilies?
I'll try,
I'll try. . . .
(*The boy is gone.*)
She loves you.

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

I can assure you now you're asleep.
Dream, boy,
lilies will wake you,
pink, blue or white.
No matter the color,
no harm can come.
She loves you. . . .

(Interlude. The figure, reflectively:)

Trees, too,
are innocent entities.
Sap sings through them
in time with the weather.
One can see
they care little about their fellows,
though they do have a way
of waving branches to each other.
For themselves,
they have a way
of nodding pleasantly.
Also of trying on dresses
near a rain glass or a snow glass.
Also of staying where they happen to be. . .
There are folk who doubt
whether they care at all.
It would be mean though
to censure
trees—they're trees. . . .

(The lovers come running upon the scene, he chasing her. He throws his basket aside; buttercups fall out.)

WHEN THE WILLOW NODS

What animals you are
or whether you are
animals, I
am too dumb to tell.
Some moments,
I feel you've come out of the earth,
out of some cool white stone
deep down in the earth;
or there brushes past
and lurks in a corner
the thought
that you slipped from a tree
when the earth stopped spinning,
that a blue shell brought you
when the sea tired waltzing.
You might be two mice,
the dryads of woodpeckers,
or a pure tiny fish dream;
you might be something dropped from the sky;
not god-children—
I wouldn't have you that—
nor clouds—
though I love clouds.
You're something not birds,
I can tell.
If I could find you somewhere
outside
of me, I might tell—
but inside? . . .

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

(The boy catches the girl; she no longer resists; he kisses her.)

Said the Mother:
She is lovely.
Her mouth is red.
Give her a kiss.
She wants it. . . .
And when you are through?
Give her another!
But you don't understand?
Why should you?

(Exhausted, the girl draws away. The boy reluctantly builds her a throne of fallen leaves. She sits down; he hands her the buttercups, a few at a time, and some colored scarfs.)

Do not make her
so happy
that when the time comes
to make her unhappy
she will be
so unhappy
she will die, lad.
Can't you be cross with her?
Can't you fail to
bring her those
buttercups?
Can't you
twang somewhere else
now and then?
She'll love you the more?

WHEN THE WILLOW NODS

Then hers is the crime if she dies!

It isn't?

Whose is it?

Better make her unhappy at once!

You can't? Well—

I don't know what you should do. . . .

(The girl, possibly sated with attention, stretches out on the leaves. The boy watches her; comes closer; seems doubtful; and stops. Then he sits down near her. Something holds him still; something else draws him still closer.)

She wears no scarf

over her hair,

no mask

over her eyes,

over her mouth.

Nor do you ask her to:

thus, you love her.

Nor do you see

veils

round her breasts,

veils

down her limbs.

Ask you to?

I speak to a stone.

You love her, thus. . . .

(The girl is startled. The boy touches her. She looks at him, rouses herself, gets up. He turns aside. She moves away. He does not follow her.)

If he were sober

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

he would love you .
as you wish to be loved
and as he would love you
if his muddled thought of you
were clear of desire.

It is sad that one so young
should be drunken so soon,
but had you not answered him,
had you not answered him . . .

I know,

I know .

it wasn't your fault. . . .

(Slowly, the lovers depart in opposite directions.)

May the sun
blink open your eyes
and find the room within
all blue,
and that tiny
broken relic
of the night's unhappiness
vanish like a moth.

You will see,
no bird
can fly
more swiftly away. . . .

(Interlude. The figure, reflectively:)

. . . again,
under the spell
of these warm-scented troubadour winds
brushing winter's convent

WHEN THE WILLOW NODS

with insinuating madrigals,
those novices,
the trees,
clicking their crooked black needles,
are knitting lace—
is it yellow, is it green?—
timid in pattern,
as clouds are,
what with their dropping of stitches.

. . . later,
grown almost heretic
through warmth of their own,
or under the foolish persuasion
that beauty can add to beauty—
and hold beauty—
one or two
will work in
patches of flowers.
. . . once again, the troubadours—
some sated, some broken-hearted—
will slip away
and the convent be as before.

. . . maybe
the Mother Superior
frowns them off? . . .

(The boy enters dejectedly. His movements are indeterminate, but he stops near the willow.)

You are so straight and still.
What does it mean?
Are you concerned

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

in the tops of you now
with sky matters
and winter butterflies?
Do not the leaves you colored
trouble you longer?
Try and recall!
Try and recall:
Over this path
she used to tread her way,
over there
he used to throne them for her:
green, brown, red, yellow!
Did you look at me?
Did you say something? . . .

*(The boy departs. . . . The girl enters dejectedly.
She sits down near the scattered remains of the
throne.)*

Girl:
Is the sap in you tired
that you no longer resist the wind?
Did you feel the rain,
the rain that was here in the night?
You aren't old—
what then?
Another rain may be lighter?
Even if it isn't—
no? . . .

(After a silence, the figure:)
She loved her love for him.
But ask her how it died,

WHEN THE WILLOW NODS

she will cry,
his faults came and stabbed it.
Over the tomb she has scrolled,
'My love for him is dead,
but my love lives on.'
And her love
carries white flowers
to what was her love for him. . . .

(The second boy enters. He looks at the girl. But as the figure continues, the boy passes aimlessly through.)

Beware, lad.
There's a lane of cherry trees
on the turn from his grave.
Don't look at her,
or you'll be plucking blossoms
in blossom time,
blossoms being pink,
or cherries in cherry time,
cherries being red,
and seeing they're a pretty
variation from the white,
her love will carry them
to what was her love for him. . . .

(The girl has not seen the second boy. She leaves the wood. After a silence, the figure:)

Only when the willow nods
does the water nod;
only when the wind nods
does the willow nod;

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

only when a cloud nods
does the wind nod;
and, of course, nod
rhymes with God. . . .

(Slow curtain.)

JACK'S HOUSE

(A Cubic-Play)

JACK'S HOUSE

A CUBIC-PLAY

(Before the rise of the curtain, a fantastic cartoon in a design of squares, triangles, rhomboids, etc., Jack is singing lustily:)

I-re-mi-fa-sol-fa-mi-
love-her-mi-fa-sol-la-sol-fa-
and-she-sol-la-ci-do-ci-la-
loves-ci-do-ci-la-sol-fa-mi-
loves-me-re-mi-re-do-
And-we-re-mi-fa-sol-fa-mi-
love-us-re-mi-fa-mi-we-do.

(After a short silence, the curtain rises—disclosing one small room. It contains one table, one chair, one couch, one cooking stove, on which one kettle is boiling—all of them small, except the chair. It has one bare window, one door—both small. Also one broom—which is large. Jack is sitting behind the table. Large square-rimmed spectacles rest on the tip of his nose as he studies a page of a ponderous volume across which may be read the words, HOUSEHOLD ACCOUNTS. Throughout the play, Jack's Wife does not speak; the character of her dialogue is suggested by her pantomime. Jack addresses practically the

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

whole of his speech to the audience. His gesticulation is geometrical. As the play progresses, his Wife begins unconsciously to imitate him.)

Two and two are four,
four and six are ten,
ten and two are twelve,
twelve and nine are twenty-one—
twenty-one—

Wife is only twenty—
twenty-one—
twenty-one and seven—
oh how I hope—
twenty-one and seven—
twenty-nine—

oh how I hope—
carry two—
I hope she'll do the housework soon.

Two and three are five,
five and four are nine—
mending cushions—
nine and one—
curtains—I wonder will she—
nine and one—
meals—I wonder will—
and one is ten and two is twelve and nine—
house without housework is no house at all—
twenty-one again—
carry two.

Two and four is—

(Jack is interrupted by the sound of a step. He

JACK'S HOUSE

shuts the book, quickly puts it away in the drawer of the table, hurries to the kettle and begins to stir its contents with a large wooden spoon. Jack's Wife enters. Adorable—might describe her. Dainty pantomime of greetings. Jack is most solicitous in aiding her with the removal of her hat. Presently, he leads her to two unfinished cushions which lie on the couch, and indicates that she should busy herself with them. She stubbornly shakes her head. He indicates some yellow curtains—likewise on the couch. She is still more stubborn. He indicates the wooden spoon, and stirs the contents of the kettle with truly magic persuasiveness. She turns her back on him. He leads her gently to the table, opens the drawer and indulges a pantomime of setting the table. She refuses the invitation. Jack seems in despair, but a sign of extraordinary good cheer not unmixed with whimsic shrewdness, breaks his mood. He takes his Wife's hands, and intones:)

Love, liebe, amore, amour
was a dear little word
for to win a lady,
love, liebe, amore, amour
was a dear little word
for to win a lord.
Now take her hand,
and you take his,
and move about in a quaint little rhomboid,
or move about in a square or circle—
a square or circle is pretty, my dears!

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

Shall it be a valse,
or shall it be a saraband?
Why not try a minuet,
gigue or polonaise?
Don't you mind false steps,
or who plays, accompaniment—
the dear little tune is ever the same:
Love, liebe, amore, amour
is a dear little word
for to hold a lady,
love, liebe, amore, amour
is a dear little word
for to hold a lord.

(Before the close of the dance, it becomes evident that Jack's Wife is more responsive to his suggestions. He leads her back to the table; this time he takes various imaginary articles, carefully, one by one, from the drawer. Reluctantly, only, does she place them as he indicates. It is easy to intimate that if the articles were real, instead of imaginary, she would have denied her share in the performance.)

We have no dishes
to eat our meals from.
We have no dishes
to eat our meals from
because we have no dishes
to eat our meals from.
We have no dishes
to eat our meals from
because we can afford no

JACK'S HOUSE

dishes to eat our meals from.
When we can afford
dishes to eat our meals from
we will have dishes
to eat our meals from.
We need no dishes
to eat our meals from,
we have fingers
to eat our meals from.

(Jack challenges the audience with a vehement nod. His Wife does the same with a nod less vehement. He places the chair ceremoniously for her to sit on, and returns to the kettle. Presently he brings the imaginary repast, sets it on the table, and after much lofty manoeuvring of helpings, sits down on the same chair, as his Wife makes room for him with tender alacrity. Imaginary eating follows. Jack, with a deal of scorn:)

We have a one-room home.
You have a two-room, three-room, four-room.
We have a one-room home
because a one-room home *holds* all we have.
We have a one-room home
because we do not want
a two-room, three-room, four-room.
If we had a two-room, three-room, four-room
we would need more than a one-room home.
We have a one-room home.
We *like* a one-room home.

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

(Apparently, Jack's Wife acquiesces in this pronouncement. But as Jack rises and indicates the presence of the next household problem, she rises and backs away from the table. He illustrates his argument by going from table to kettle and back again, carrying the imaginary dishes—but without prevailing. He turns his back on her. Slowly, laboriously, he stirs the dishes with a mop. But ever so gently, ever so impersonally and tactfully, he sings to himself:)

I-re-mi-fa-sol-fa-mi-
love-her-mi-fa-sol-la-sol-fa-
and-she-sol-la-ci-do-ci-la—

(Unseen by Jack, his Wife has wandered to the window. Idly, like a child, and nodding in tempo, she traces shapes with her finger. She stops, eyes Jack, looks down, looks up, and then moves towards the couch. He recommences, as though unaware of a change:)

I-re-mi-fa-sol-fa-mi-
love-her-mi-fa-sol-la-sol-fa-
and-she-sol-la-ci-do-ci-la—

(His Wife falters, and then sits down. She begins, most tentatively, to finger one of the cushions.)

And-she-sol-la-ci-do-ci-la?

(They exchange sidelong glances. Jack smiles; so does his Wife. He quickens the tempo of his tune and goes to the drawer:)

loves-ci-do-ci-la-sol-fa-mi?

(He sends her a glance. She nods and he pulls open the drawer and gets her work basket:)

JACK'S HOUSE

loves-ci-do-ci-la-sol-fa-mi-
loves-me-re-mi-re-do—

(*He hands her the basket with a touch of legerdemain:*)

loves-me-re-mi-re-do.
And-we-re-mi-fa-sol-fa-mi-
love-us-re-mi-fa-mi-we-do.

(*Jack goes back to the kettle. His Wife begins to work on the cushions. He has to send her occasional glances of encouragement. Presently, he takes the broom, and, with what looks like obliviousness, sweeps with such vigorous strokes and such delicate finesse that a little pile of dust is gathered and deftly urged into a corner. With much twirling of the broom, and interruptions by way of bowing to the audience, gesticulating and posturing, he has been offering the following, at the conclusion of which the broom is put away with an ecstatic sigh.*)

She has two green pillows
on our black couch.
They should be cerulean bolsters
on a lemon silk divan
and you would not
challenge me that
she has two green pillows
on our black couch,
and I would not
challenge you that *yours*
has cerulean bolsters
on your lemon silk divan.

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

Have cerulean bolsters
on your lemon silk divan
and let us have
two green pillows
on our black couch.

(His Wife seems not a little pleased with herself, so much so that when Jack sits down to help her with advice, she nudges him away. He can scarcely control his joy. To hide it, he concerns himself with imaginary chores, to a hummed version of his tune. Observing that his Wife has laid aside the cushions, he slyly attempts to pick up the curtains, but she snatches them away. He indulges a pantomime of angry, defeated pride, and then resorts to petting the pillows. His Wife does not object. He rocks the pillows in his arms, and attacks the audience with insinuating tenderness.)

We have many, many children
I would sing you of,
but you would not call
them any, any children.
And what is it to you how
many, many children we have,
so—why should I sing you of
any, any children we have?

(Jack lays the pillows down. His Wife begins sewing on the curtains. Tactfully, he renews his search for imagined chores. She motions him towards the window, and suggests washing it. Jack is so surprised

JACK'S HOUSE

she has to repeat her pointing several times. He nods in approbation, finds the mop and dips it in the kettle. The water is hot, assuredly. However, a glance of his, followed by a slow look, at the window, holds him back. With a gesture akin to reverence, he turns from the window, and comes close to the audience. In strict, prayerful confidence, to which his Wife listens, doubtfully, and then slowly bows her head, and sews.)

Our window is stained
with the figures she has blown on it.

Our window is stained
with the figures she has blown on it
with her breath.

Our window is stained
with the figures she has blown on it
with her breath

on which a spirit has blown—

A spirit? a saint? a sprite?

who was it

blew figures on her breath

that our window is stained

with the figures she has blown on it?

(Jack goes back to the window, but he exerts extreme care in his efforts not to wipe out the figures. His Wife has finished the curtains; she steals behind him. Jack stands there in utter contemplation, but as she approaches, comes back to the situation and tries to anticipate her purpose by taking the curtains. She bluntly denies him any part in the hanging. With mock resignation Jack permits himself to be overruled.

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

But while his Wife hangs the curtains, he confides his ecstasy to the audience.)

She *likes* to make shades,
yellow shades for the window,
but if you ask her why
she likes to make shades,
yellow shades for the window,
she would not tell you why
she likes to make shades,
yellow shades for the window,
except that she likes to.
If you ask *me* why
she likes to make shades,
yellow shades for the window,
I could tell you why,
but you might think me proud,
so I will not tell you why
she likes to make shades,
yellow shades for the window.

(His Wife has finished hanging the curtains. She steals behind and touches him. Jack turns and lifts her gently off the floor, for a mere moment. His happy exhaustion becomes so apparent that his Wife has to lead him to the couch and deposit him there—almost like a child. He does not resist. She snuggles down beside him. Together, they look about the room. Jack, to his Wife:)

This room
is our cradle.
It will rock

JACK'S HOUSE

in our memory
no matter what
we grow to.

*(As the curtain falls, they can be heard humming
the strain of I-re-mi--fa-sol-fa-mi.)*

LIMA BEANS

(A Scherzo-Play)

LIMA BEANS

A SCHERZO-PLAY

(The characters are four: husband, wife, the voice of a huckster and—the curtain! Husband and wife might be two marionnettes. The scene is a miniature dining room large enough to contain a small table, two chairs, a tiny sideboard, an open window, a closed door leading to the other rooms, and additional elbow space. Pantomime is modestly indulged by husband and wife, suggesting an inoffensive parody, unless the author errs, of the contours of certain ancient Burmese dances. The impedimenta of occasional rhymes are unpremeditated. If there must be a prelude of music, let it be nothing more consequential than one of the innocuous parlor rondos of Carl Maria Von Weber. As a background color scheme, black and white might not prove amiss.

As the curtain, which is painted in festoons of vegetables, rises gravely, the wife is disclosed setting the table for dinner. Aided by the sideboard, she has attended to her place, as witness the neat arrangement of plate, cup and saucer, and knife, fork and spoons at one side. Now, more consciously, she begins the performance of the important duty opposite. This question of concrete paraphernalia, and the action consequent thereupon, might of course be left entirely to the imagination of the beholder.)

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

The Wife (wistfully whimsical)—

Put a knife here,
place a fork there—
marriage is greater than love.
Give him a large spoon,
give him a small—
you're sure of your man when you dine him.
A cup for his coffee,
a saucer for spillings,
a plate rimmed with roses
to hold his night's fillings—
roses for hearts; ah,
but food for the appetite!

Mammals are happiest home after dark!

(*The rite over, she stands off in critical admiration, her arms akimbo, her head bobbing from side to side. Then, seriously, as she eyes the husband's dinner plate.*)

But what shall I give him to eat to-night?
It mustn't be limas,
we've always had limas—
one more lima would shatter his love!

(*An answer comes through the open window from the dulcet insinuatingly persuasive horn of the huckster.*)

The Wife—Oh, ah, ooh!

The Huckster (singing mysteriously)—

I got tomatoes,
I got potatoes,
I got new cabbages,

LIMA BEANS

I got *cauliflower*,
I got *red beets*,
I got *onions*,
I got *lima beans*—

The Wife (who has stolen to the window, fascinated)—Any fruit?

The Huckster—

I got *oranges*,
I got *pineapples*,
blackberries,
currants,
blueberries,
I got *bananas*,
I got—

The Wife—Bring me some string beans!

The Huckster—Yes, mam! (*His head bobs in at the window.*)

The Wife (takes some coins from the sideboard. A paper bag is flung into the room. The wife catches it and airily tosses the coins into the street. Presently, she takes a bowl from the sideboard, sits down, peeps into the bag, dramatically tears it open, and relapses into a gentle rocking as she strings the beans to this invocation)—

String the crooked ones,
string the straight—
love needs a change every meal.
To-morrow, come kidney beans,
Wednesday, come white or black—
limas, return not too soon!

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

The string bean rules in the
vegetable kingdom,
gives far more calories, sooner digests—
love through with dinner is quicker to play!
Straight ones, crooked ones,
string beans are blessed!

(Enter the husband briskly. In consternation, the wife tries to hide the bowl, but sets it on the table and hurries to greet him. He spreads his hands and bows.)

She—Good evening, sweet husband!

He—Good evening, sweet wife!

She—You're back, I'm so happy—

He—So am I—'twas a day—

She—'Twas a day?

He—For a hot sweating donkey—

She—A donkey?

He—A mule!

She—My poor, dear, poor spouse—

He—No, no, my good mouse—

She—Rest your tired, weary arms—

He—They're not tired, I'm not weary—

I'd perspire tears and blood drops
just to keep my mouse in cheese.

In a town or in the fields,
on the sea or in a balloon,
with a pickaxe or a fiddle,
with one's back a crooked wish-bone,
occupation, labor, work—
work's a man's best contribution.

She—Contribution?

LIMA BEANS

He—Yes, to Hymen!

She—Ah yes—

He—But you haven't—

She—I haven't?

He—You haven't—

She—I haven't?

He—You have *not*—

She—Ah yes, yes indeed!

(The wife embraces the husband and kisses him daintily six times.)

He—Stop, queer little dear!

Why is a kiss?

She—I don't know.

He—You don't?

She—No!

He—Then why do you do it?

She—Love!

He—Love?

She—Yes!

He—And why is love?

She—I don't know.

He—You don't?

She—No!

He—And why don't you know?

She—Because!

He—Because?

She—Yes!

He—Come, queer little dear!

(The husband embraces the wife and kisses her daintily six times.)

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

He (solemnly)—And now!

She (nervously)—And now?

He—And now!

She—And now?

He—And now I am hungry.

She—And now you are hungry?

He—Of course I am hungry.

She—To be sure you are hungry, but—

He—But?

She—But!

He—But?

(The wife tries to edge between the husband and the table. He gently elbows her aside. She comes back; he elbows her less gently. This pantomime is repeated several times; his elbowing is almost rough at the last. The husband reaches the table and ogles the bowl. His head twists from the bowl to the wife, back and forth. An ominous silence.)

He—String beans?

She—String beans!

He—String beans?

She—String beans!

(A still more ominous silence. The husband's head begins fairly to bob, only to stop abruptly as he breaks forth)—

*He—I perspire tears and blood drops
in a town or in the fields,
on the sea or in a balloon,
with my pickaxe or my fiddle,
just to come home*

LIMA BEANS

footsore, starving, doubled with appetite
to a meal of—string beans?

Where are my limas?

She—We had—

He—We had?

She—Lima beans yesterday—we had them—

He—We had them?

She—Day before yesterday—

He—What of it?

She—Last Friday, last Thursday—

He—I know it—

She—Last Wednesday, last Tuesday—

He—What then, mam?

She—We had them

all the way since we were married—

He—Two weeks ago this very day—

She—I thought you'd have to have a change—

He—A change—

She—I thought you'd like to have a change—

He—A change?

You thought?

I'd like?

A change?

What!

From the godliest of vegetables,
my kingly bean,
that soft, soothing,
succulent, caressing,
creamy, persuasively serene,
my buttery entity?

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

You would dethrone it?
You would play renegade?
You'd raise an usurper
in the person of this
elongated, cadaverous,
throat-scratching, greenish
caterpillar—
you'd honor a parochial,
menial pleb,
an accursed legume,
sans even the petty grandeur
of cauliflower,
radish, pea,
onion, asparagus,
potato, tomato—
to the rank of household god?
Is this your marriage?
Is this your creed of love?
Is this your contribution?
Dear, dear,
was there some witch at the altar
who linked your hand with mine in troth
only to have it broken in a bowl?
Ah, dear, dear—

She—Dear, dear!

He—You have listened to a temptress—

She—I have listened to my love of you—

He—You, the pure, the angelic—

She—Husband, dear—

He—Silence!

LIMA BEANS

She—Husband!

He—Silence!

(The wife collapses into her chair. The husband seizes the bowl to this malediction)—

Worms,

snakes,

reptiles,

caterpillars,

I do not know from whence ye came,
but I know whither ye shall go.

My love,

my troth,

my faith

shall deal with ye.

Avaunt,

vanish,

begone

from this domicile,

dedicated,

consecrated,

immortalized

in the name of Hymen!

Begone!

(The husband throws the bowl and beans out of the window. The customary crash of broken glass, off-stage, is heard. A smothered sob escapes the wife. The husband strides towards the door. The wife raises her head.)

She—Husband!

He—Traitor!

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

She—Love, sweet husband!

He—Traitress, traitress!

(The husband glares at the wife, and slams the door behind him. The wife collapses again. Her body rocks to and fro. Silence. Then, still more mysteriously than the first time, the horn and the voice of the huckster. The wife stops rocking, raises her head and gets up. A woe-begone expression vanishes before one of eagerness, of housewifely shrewdness, of joy. She steals to the window.)

The Huckster—I got oranges,

I got pineapples,

I got blackberries,

I got currants,

I got blueberries,

I got bananas,

I got—

The Wife—Any vegetables?

The Huckster—I got tomatoes,

I got potatoes,

new cabbages,

cauliflower,

red beets,

I got string beans,

I got—

The Wife—Bring me some lima beans!

The Huckster—I got onions,

I got—

The Wife—Bring me some lima beans!

LIMA BEANS

The Huckster—Yes, mam! (His head appears again.)

(The performance of paper bag and coins is repeated. Excitedly, the wife takes another bowl from the sideboard. She sits down, tears open the bag, clicks her heels, and hastily, recklessly, begins splitting the limas. One or two pop out and bound along the floor. The wife stops. Pensively:)

There you go,
hopping away,
just like bad sparrows—
no, no, more like him.

(She smiles a little.)

Hopping away,
no, he's not a sparrow,
he's more like a
poor angry boy—and so soon!

(She lets the beans slip through her fingers.)

Lima beans, string beans,
kidney beans, white or black—
you're all alike—
though not all alike to him.

(She perks her head.)

It's alike to me
what's alike to him—

(She looks out of the window.)

though I'm sorry for you,
crooked strings, straight strings,
and so glad for you,
creamy ones, succulent—

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

what did he say of you?

(She returns to splitting the limas; with crescendo animation.)

Heighho, it's all one to me,

so he loves what I do,

I'll do what he loves.

Angry boy? No, a man

quite young in the practise

of wedlock—and love!

Come, limas, to work now—

we'll serve him, heart, appetite,

whims, crosspatches and all—

though we boil for it later!

The dinner bell calls us,

ding, dong, ding, dell!

(The husband opens the door and pokes in his head. The wife hears him and is silent. He edges into the room and then stops, humble, contrite, abject. Almost in a whisper)—

Wife!

(She does not heed him. He, louder)—

Sweet wife!

(She does not answer. He, still louder)—

Beloved,

dear, dearest wife!

(She does not answer. He approaches carefully, almost with reverence, watches her, takes the other chair and cautiously sets it down next to hers.)

He—Wife!

She—Yes?

LIMA BEANS

He—Will you—
I want to—
won't you—
may I sit next to you?

She—Yes.

He—I want to—
will you—
won't you
forgive me—I'll
eat all the beans in the world!

(The wife looks up at the husband roguishly. He drops down beside her with the evident intention of putting his arm about her, only to jump up as, inadvertently, he has looked into the bowl. He rubs his eyes, sits down slowly, looks again, only to jump up again. The third time he sits down with extreme caution, like a zoologist who has come upon a new specimen of insect. The wife seems oblivious of his emotion. He rises, looks from one side of her, then the other, warily. At last, rapturously.)

He—Lima beans?

(She looks up tenderly and invitingly, indicating his chair.)

She—Lima beans!

(He sits down beside her. With greater awe and emphasis.)

He—Lima beans?

She—Lima beans!

(A moment of elfin silence.)

He—Sweet wife!

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

She—Sweet husband!

He—Where—

whence—

how did it—

how did it happen?

She—I don't know.

He—You do—

you do know—

She—I don't!

He—Tiny miracle,

you do—

you're a woman,

you're a wife,

you're an imp—

you do know!

She—Well—

He—Well?

She—Er—

He—Eh?

She—Somebody—

He—Yes, yes?

She—Somebody—

sent them—

He—Sent them?

She—Brought them!

He—Brought them?

She—Yes!

He—Who?

She—Somebody!

He—Somebody who?

LIMA BEANS

She—I can't tell—

He—You can.

She—I—won't tell—

He—You will—

She—I won't—

He—You will—

She—Well!

He—Well?

She—You ought to know!

He—I ought to?

She—You ought to—

He—But I don't—

She—Yes, you do!

He—I do not—

She—You do!

(The husband eyes the wife thoughtfully. She aids him with a gently mischievous smile. He smiles back in understanding.)

He—I know!

She—You do not—

He—Yes, I do!

She—Are you sure?

He—Sure enough—

She—Who was it?

He—I won't tell—

She—You will!

(He points at the audience with warning, goes to the keyhole and listens, draws the window-shade and returns. She nods quickly and puts her head closer to his, her wide-open eyes on the audience. He puts

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

his head to hers, his wide-open eyes on the audience, then turns quickly and whispers something in her ear. She nods with secret, uproarious delight.)

She—Yes!

He—Yes?

She—Yes!

(They embrace and click their heels with unrestrained enthusiasm. | The wife holds out the bowl to the husband with mock solemnity. He grasps it and together they raise it above their heads, lower it to their knees, and then shell the beans with one accord.) They kiss each other daintily six times. The curtain begins to quiver. As before, but accelerando.)

He—Stop, queer little dear!

Why is a kiss?

She—I don't know.

He—You don't?

She—No!

He—Then why do you do it?

She—Love!

He—Love?

She—Yes!

He—And why is—

(They are interrupted. The curtain comes capering down! The last we behold of the happy pair is their frantic signaling for the curtain to wait till they have finished. But curtains cannot see—or understand?)

BLUE AND GREEN

(A Shadow-Play)

BLUE AND GREEN

A SHADOW-PLAY

(Three different miniature scenes which, for convenience, might be understood as Scene I, Scene II, Scene III. In Scene I, the predominant note is a small group of live oaks; in Scene II, cedars, one of which is taller than the rest, in an environment of yellow desert and sage brush; Scene III, a single, tall eucalyptus in red-blossom time. A hint of blue sea is the background; the locality, California. The action takes place with the three scenes constantly in view. They are separated from one another by mist-like curtains or partitions.)

(A young man is hurriedly looking about among the live oaks. Their low gnarled stature and twisted arms throw weird shadows about him. He stops and speaks breathlessly)—

She blew two kisses—
down an air current—
and I at the other end—
it felt like the
roar, darkness and mad rocks
of an iniquitous cave!
But this is no cave?
Two kisses?

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

Why, there were eight of them,
each the more insidious
for the silence of them,
eight thistle-down ubiquities
avalanched by the eight fingers of her two
hands—

there would have been ten had she thought of
her thumbs!

Woman never expresses herself
unless man has brought the occasion,
and then only, only when
a period has elapsed
sufficient to provide her
with some indubitable credential
of the character of his intention!

Immortal controversy—
why, the character of mine
has been chasing her for days,
clutching at her like a tree,
shouting imprecation!

But at that egregious moment—
I said nothing, asked nothing, did nothing,
when—

quicker than a breeze or a rain drop—
two kisses, eight kisses, ten?
Can it be she loves me at last?

There you are!

*(A young woman has appeared under one of the
oaks. She eyes him; he eyes her. They parley.)*

He—You blew two kisses—

BLUE AND GREEN

She—I did not—

He—Eight kisses—

She—I did not—

He—There would have been ten—

She—There would not—

He—You love me—

She—I do not!

He—At any rate—

She—At any rate?

He—Come and sit down.

She—I've sat down before.

He—Let us weigh the question.

She—We've weighed it before.

He—Let us premise a new discussion—

She—Old discussion—

He—With the assumption you don't love me.

She—The assumption?

He—The admission!

(She approaches warily. He arranges a place on the ground for her. He sits down a fair distance away.)

He—Higgle—

She—Haggle—

He—Haggle—

She—Higgle—

He—I know

my craziness about you
is compounded of some
fifty percent
craziness about me,
but if you

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

will chip from your
hundred percent (if it's that)
craziness about you
five or ten percent for a
craziness about me,
I feel mayhap
we'd compound a single craziness
so marvelously sane
the very fish wives would covet it!
Let the males of the market
flout it, barter
of a bag of stale flounders
for a luscious fresh vegetable,
or shriek: he's passed a counterfeit!
I'll even take in exchange
a Chinese coin
ninety-nine percent hole
and leave it at our demise
to dance along the silver-wire
memory of immortal bits!

She—And your counterfeit?

He—My your-me?

I'm sorry
I can't
weigh that—
will you?

She (*mischievously*)—

Higgle—

He (*in disgust*)—

Haggle—

BLUE AND GREEN

She—Haggle—

He—Damn!

(He has moved closer to her, but turns away. She touches him. He looks at her. They embrace tenderly. Pause. They release each other. He looks down.)

She—You love me?

He—Verily.

You love me?

She—Indeed!

He—How you starved me—

She—I did not—

I blew you two kisses?

He—Eight kisses!

She—Ten thousand!

He—With your thumbs?

She—With my thought!

He—Blessed fish-wife!

She—Not fish-wife!

He—I mean tree-troll!

She—Nor tree-troll!

He—Woman!

(The scenes darken gradually. She nestles against his shoulder. Suddenly, she indicates the live oaks. He follows her gesture doubtfully.)

She—I'm afraid.

He—Afraid?

Afraid of the trees?

She—Not of the trees!

He—Afraid of me?

She—Nor of you!

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

He—Of what?

She—Of love!

He—Of love?

She—Not of love!

He—Not of love?

She—Of everything—

He—Everything?

She—Everything which isn't love!

He—I don't understand?

She (*dreamily*)—

I once saw two bubbles on a pond.

They eyed the sun a little while,

so contentedly,

then blinked one blink and were as nothing.

They died, didn't they?

He—Doubtless they did—

She—Then I saw two gnats.

They sped back and forth across the pond,

so contentedly,

and then disappeared,

one behind a rock, the other down below,

and were as nothing.

They parted, didn't they?

He—Doubtless they did—

She—I sat there with the past, present and future.

I thought of nothing.

But there was something in me,

a faint, wavering desire

for something beyond me

and that past, present and future—

BLUE AND GREEN

He—Here I am!

She—I know, but—

He—But?

She—Will we be like the bubbles?

He—No!

She—Will we be like the gnats?

He—No, no!

She—If we are the bubbles,
at least we would die—
but if we are the gnats!

He—But we're going to live!

She—Live, yes, but—

He—But again?

She—There's a living which is dying.

He—The everything which isn't love?

She—Yes!

He—The everything in us which isn't?

She—Yes, yes!

He—But is there such a thing in us?

She—My love!

He—Your love?

She—And your love!

He—My love?

She—I love the me in you—
and you the you in me!

He—Is that what love is?

She— Can't it be something beyond—
more than the me—
more than the me we crave—
tell me what love is!

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

(He draws her still closer and shakes his head. A gentle silence.)

She (almost in a sing song)—

If you'll tell me what love is,
how little of it is love,
how much of it everything else,
how little of it feeling for you,
how much of it cat-like selfishness,
how much of it lust of power,
luring the other into your hands
to re-model after your own image,
only to find the image mean,
commonplace, bitterly familiar,
a sight to efface with the first recognition—

He (in imitation)—

How much of it
is re-modelling yourself to the other image,
what one supposes the other to be,
or rather what it should be, must be,
and one destroys not only the image,
but the reality as well—
if there is a reality in her for me,
if she is, not seems,
and I don't learn, as of old,
one asks her to be what one wants her to be—
is so much of oneself so unfriendly?

*She—*If you'll tell me the direction of it,
your saying, I love you,
my saying, I love you,
and the first apprehension of caresses—

BLUE AND GREEN

He—Desire and satiety—

She—Desire and satiety—

He—How much of it will repeat past adventuring,
with the inevitable disclosure,
one is what one is—

She—And chance is what it is—

He—The moon, sun, sea, hill, earth, tree or flower
playing circumstance
to what-he-is, what-she-is
and what-they-are-together
all over the world!

She—Dear—

so dear you are to me—
let us go on sitting so,
you there, I here,
under these dark, weird, clamorous trees,
until the first interruption,
until we find out—

He—Though I can tell and you can tell,
we'll never find out till we try?

She—And should we try?

He—Should we try—

She—Most likely because it's ever the fashion,
I'll know even less,
and you'll know even less—

He—And I'll wonder why we tried,
and you'll wonder why we tried—

She—And I'll be more stupid,
and you'll be more stupid—

He—And a little sadder—

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

She—And a little sadder—

He—And a little loner—

She—And a little loner—

He—And I'll sit down with some other—

She—And I'll sit down with some other—

He—Just like this, just like that—

She—And we'll begin again—

if not from the beginning—

He—And I'll recall you as I watch her,

and you, me as you watch him—

She—And I'll marvel and you'll marvel

that one's feeling—

He—Is it the same, though not the same?

She—And so on and around and back again.

He—That's a beautiful sky through there—

California skies are bluest of all,

and California deserts

and California seas

and California clouds—

She—And that will be a beautiful sky—

Maine skies are greenest of all,

and Maine woods

and Maine lakes

and the grass of Maine—

He—Or will it be Oregon—

where will it be?

She—Dearest,

if you'll tell me what love is,

if you'll tell me it's ever so little,

a little outside the circle,

BLUE AND GREEN

I'll butterfly chance with you
beyond these terrible trees—
and over the calm of the Pacific
to white-shawled China—

He—Are the waves out there white-shawled?
Which is the mirage—
wave or shawl—
do you care?

She—Or sit just so—

He—You there, I here—

She—Until—

He—Until—

some tower bell,
duty call—
finds us asleep!

She—Or the sun blink us dead!

* * * * *

*(The scenes are touched with the light of the moon.
A few weeks later. The young man is walking about
among the cedars. He stops near a gravestone—of
which there are several; they are small and old.)*

Graveyards?

I suppose they are—
fun.

This fellow down here—
who—
whom did he love and—
she?

Did she—did she have cruel—
eyes?

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

Did she—oh those trees!
Why do they hunch their backs and—
sigh?
Did she—and that wind!
What makes him cramp his chest and—
groan?
And that sea, and the moon, those infernal
clouds—
Didn't she—didn't she love him at all?
And these white-eyed, white-eyed stones!
Graveyards?
I suppose they are—
when she loves you—
fun.
Ah to be able to die!

*(The young woman appears. The young man tries
to retreat, but she sees him.)*

*He—*You here?

*She—*And you?

*He—*Then you must love me a little?

Come and sit down!

*She—*I'm afraid.

*He—*Afraid of the stones?

*She—*Of the graves.

*He—*Here's a stone which isn't a grave?

(She joins him. They sit down.)

*He—*How you have suffered!

*She—*And you!

*He—*Am I not dear to you?

*She—*Yes, and I?

BLUE AND GREEN

He—You are so dear to me!

Dear!

She—Yes?

He—Isn't it best now

to give suffering its way with us,
like a sea with a stone,
and let the spray which was our joy—
the spray dancing on us
while bounding and tumbling and rolling here—
give us content?
Suffering
carves smoothness
which cannot cut any longer,
should we roll again?

She—We will never roll again.

He—We will!

She—Not with each other.

He—With somebody else?

She—Nor somebody else.

He—Not in Maine?

She—Nor in Oregon.

He—We aren't bubbles?

She—We are.

He—We are alive!

She—Not for each other.

He—We are *here*!

She—Yes.

He—What brought us here?

She—Death.

He—What estranged us?

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

She—I don't know.

He—Why did you—
slip behind a rock?

She—I don't know.

He—Did I do something?

She—No.

He—Did you? Did we?

She—No.

He—What estranged us?

She—What we didn't do—
love!

He—We did love.

She—We loved—

He—We did love?

She—Ourselves.

He—What brought you here?

She—A burial.

He—What burial?

She—I have come
from pride
all the way up to humility
this day-to-night.
The hill
was more terrible
than ever before.
This is the top;
there is the tall, slim tree.
It isn't bent; it doesn't lean;
it is only looking back.
At dawn,

BLUE AND GREEN

under that tree,
still another me of mine
was buried.
Waiting for me to come again,
humorously solicitous
of what I bring next—
it looks down.

He—Of what you bring next?
Then you'll live again?
You are alive?

She—Everything which isn't love.

He—Then you did love—

She—I did not, nor you.

He—I did!

She—You loved yourself.

He—And what lies buried there?

She—My self-love.

He—But I loved

you,

I loved

you,

I loved—

She—You.

(He draws closer to her; timidly puts his arm about her. She does not resist. Two shadows take entity among the live oaks. They dance a dirge.)

He—Let memory have its way for a while!

Think of the life we had!

(She bows her head. The shadows move with a little animation; they offer strange love to each other

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

—*fragments of the lovers' life in Scene I. They bring gifts to each other. They dance, hand in hand; then well apart, then hand in hand, then far apart.*)

He—Weren't our gifts—

She—Self-love.

He—Our thoughts?

She—Self-love.

He—Didn't we have—
each of the other—

She—We are
what we want.
We love
what we receive
of what we want.
Somewhere between
mountain and sea,
relation falls.

He—What did you want?

She—Your me.

He—And I?

She—My you.

(He bows his head. She notices the shadows.)

She—Those people out there
moving about in mist,
dancing mist,
dancing blue-gray mist—
(or do they do the dancing?)
he's always coming so close to her,
she's always going so close to him—
but they never touch.

BLUE AND GREEN

He—Don't you love them?
Queer beautiful things.
Mist people.
Moving mist people.
Dancing mist people.
You ought to—
you're one of them.

She—And you.

(The shadows vanish. She rises. He rises, but does not detain her.)

He—Won't you come again?

She—Yes, but not here.

He—Then I may hope—

She—The way I hope.

He—Just to meet?

She—Just to meet.

He—Ah, then we hope—

She—Together, yes.

Good-night.

He—Good-night.

(She leaves. He speaks, and leaves in the opposite direction.)

The me of me
I would have you love
is the one who thinks of you.
The mes of me
who growl their love
think of themselves.
Only your me
loves you.

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

In the night,
when they,
drunk brawling for you,
go to their cots,
he rises,
lights a candle,
and silently, bravely,
begins a new service.

(The man-shadow appears for a moment in Scene II and suggests the reference to the lighting of a candle.)

* * * * *

(It is early morning. The young woman may be seen under the eucalyptus. The man-shadow—in Scene II—dances to her opening lines.)

He came,
that wistful child,
on his way to red,
deep red:
he came—
and they tried to tell me,
he was dawn.
He went,
that listless thing,
on his way to black,
deep black:
he went—
and they tried to tell me,
he was night.

BLUE AND GREEN

(The young man enters. He comes forward without astonishment. She joins him.)

He—I knew I would find you.

She—I knew you would come.

He—Are you glad?

She—I am glad.

(They touch hands. He looks about and then at the sky. So does she. The woman-shadow joins the man-shadow in Scene II.)

He—In the great clouds there is rain.

A swift rain.

A rain that kills.

She—And a slow rain.

A rain that comes like leaves.

He—I would be the slow rain.

She—In the hills there is a god
who rolls from side to side.

He—In the valley a no-god
who lifts his arms like a tree.

She—I would be the no-god.

He—In the market, there are children.

And there are old people.

Very old people.

She—I wouldn't be the children,
but the old people,
the very old people.

He—There is a woman.

Big with gentle yielding.

She—I would be like her.

(He turns her towards the eucalyptus.)

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

He—There's a tree not far away.

I think I could climb it.

And I know I'd like to climb it.

And there's a reason I'd like to climb it.

Do you see the parasol of flowers—

that's half the reason—

the other, I'm certain you'd like one.

(These are the facts.)

One of the flowers would do.

It has delicate Indian-red radii—

She—They spread from a cup of an olive shade—

He—And the cup is hard, like an acorn—

She—And the outside turns

from olive green to faint amber to old rose—

He—And the cup has a stem, like a darning needle,

olive green, faint amber, old rose,

a stem you can stick in your hair,

or slip in a slit of your bodice—

your hair is the proper shade,

and your bodice of the lemon green.

Indeed, you could fancy the flower a parasol

and hold it over your head—

but your head, though small, would feel the
sun.

She—Or the rain!

He—(These are facts of the flower.)

The tree isn't far away.

I feel I could climb it.

But a thought hinders me.

I've dealt in flowers heretofore—

BLUE AND GREEN

- She*—And in sea shells, and music,
and antiquated books, and coins,
and bowls, and nondescript trinkets—
- He*—And in unseen gifts,
intangible things one hasn't a name for.
And the folk who took them—
- She*—Put them to strange uses,
devices you never intended.
- He*—Often I gave them for the fun of giving—
not that giving we deem a virtue—
- She*—But that giving which is solace
against asking and receiving.
- He*—Often I gave them for the fun of receiving—
was that an evil receiving?
Often I gave them without calculation—
at any rate, often I gave them.
- She*—And they fell into antics,
played upon by folk pranks of character—
- He*—Pranks I'll never understand—
- She*—Born of misrepresentation—
- He*—Innocent misrepresentation.
You know the misadventure—
there are lines, radii,
near your eyes and in your cheeks.
(These are facts of misadventuring.)
- She*—The tree isn't far away.
- He*—And you'd like, at least, that Indian flower.
What shall I do?
- She*—Would intimacy come,
olive green, faint amber, old rose?

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

What would happen then?

He—Lesser radii—
for the moment?

She—Deeper radii—
for all time?

He—(This is the inference.)
Would you have me—do?

(She nods almost imperceptibly. It has begun, almost imperceptibly, to rain. He leads her under the tree.)

He—Come and sit down—
if you aren't afraid?

She—I am not afraid!

He—See, there are fallen flowers here.

She—You won't have to climb!

He—I am tired.

She—Dear, sit down—
and I'll bring you a flower.

(After a tender pantomime of urging and resistance, she makes him sit down, and brings him a flower. He, too, has found one; so they exchange. She sits down beside him.)

He—This isn't Maine!

She—Nor Oregon!

He—But it's green here!

She—And I'll sit down with some other—

He—And I'll sit down with some other—

She—Just like this—

He—Just like that—

(They laugh quietly.)

BLUE AND GREEN

He—And we'll begin again—

She—If not from the beginning—

He—And I'll recall you—

She—And I'll recall you—

He—And I'll marvel—

She—That one's feeling—

He—Is it the same, though not the same?

She—It's a little sadder—

He—It's a little sadder?

She—And a little lonelier—

He—And a little lonelier?

She—I can't breathe, can't live—

He—Without me?

She—Without *me*!

He—Am I your me?

She—And I yours!

He—Still?

She—Still!

(They laugh again, and embrace tenderly.)

He—And what shall we do for our you?

She—There is no you—

He—But suppose

your me

and my you—

suppose

your me

and my you—

She—Have a little you?

He—Have a little you!

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

(She rises; he rises. She leads him from the tree. It has stopped raining. The shadows have vanished.)

She—Let us go.

He—Which way?

She—This way.

He—That way?

She—And beyond.

He—And beyond?

She—Towards you!

He—And you!

(Arm in arm, they disappear. The shadows come for a moment into Scene III and dance an ethereal movement, suggesting an apotheosis of the last motive. Curtain.)

MANIKIN AND MINIKIN

(A Bisque-Play)

MANIKIN AND MINIKIN

A BISQUE-PLAY

(Seen through an oval frame, one of the walls of a parlor. The wallpaper is a conventionalized pattern. Only the shelf of the mantelpiece shows. At each end, seated on pedestals turned slightly away from one another, two aristocratic bisque figures, a boy in delicate cerisse and a girl in cornflower blue. Their shadows join in a grotesque silhouette. In the center, an ancient clock whose tick acts as the metronome for the sound of their high voices. Presently, the mouths of the figures open and shut after the mode of ordinary conversation.)

She—Manikin!

He—Minikin?

She—That fool of a servant has done it again.

He—I should say, she's more than a fool.

She—A meddlesome busybody—

He—A brittle-fingered noddy!

She—Which way are you looking? What do you see?

He—The everlasting armchair,
the everlasting tiger skin,
the everlasting yellow, green and purple books,

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

the everlasting portrait of milord—
She—Oh these Yankees!—and I see
the everlasting rattan rocker,
the everlasting samovar,
the everlasting noisy piano,
the everlasting portrait of milady—
He—Simpering spectacle!
She—What does she want, always dusting?
He—I should say—
that is, I'd consider the thought—
She—You'd consider a lie—
oh Manikin—
you're trying to defend her!
He—I'm not defending her—
She—You're trying to—
He—I'm not trying to—
She—Then what are you trying to—
He—Well, I'd venture to say,
if she'd only stay away some morning—
She—That's what I say in my dreams!
He—She and her broom—
She—Her everlasting broom—
He—She wouldn't be sweeping—
She—Every corner, every cranny, every crevice—
He—And the dust wouldn't move—
She—Wouldn't crawl, wouldn't rise, wouldn't fly—
He—And cover us all over—
She—Like a spider-web—ugh!
He—Everlasting dust has been most of our life—
She—Everlasting years and years of dust!

MANIKIN AND MANIKIN

He—You on your lovely blue gown—

She—And you on your manly pink cloak.

He—If she didn't sweep, we wouldn't need
dusting—

She—Nor need taking down, I should say—

He—With her stupid, clumsy hands—

She—Her crooked, monkey paws—

He—And we wouldn't need putting back—

She—I with my back to you—

He—I with my back to you.

She—It's been hours, days, weeks—

by the sound of that everlasting clock—
and the coming of day and the going of day—
since I saw you last!

He—What's the use of the sun

with its butterfly wings of light—

what's the use of a sun made to see by—
if I can't see you!

She—Manikin!

He—Minikin?

She—Say that again!

He—Why should I say it again—don't you know?

She—I know, but sometimes I doubt—

He—Why do you, what do you doubt?

She—Please say it again!

He—What's the use of a sun —

She—What's the use of a sun?

He—That was made to see by—

She—That was made to see by?

He—If I can't see you!

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

She—Oh, Manikin!

He—Minikin?

She—If you hadn't said that again,
my doubt would have filled a balloon.

He—Your doubt, which doubt, what doubt?

She—And although I can't move,
although I can't move unless somebody shoves
me,
one of these days when the sun isn't here,
I would have slipped over the edge
of this everlasting shelf—

He—Minikin!

She—And fallen to that everlasting floor
into so many fragments,
they'd never paste Minikin together again!

He—Minikin, Minikin!

She—They'd have to set another here—
some Ninikin, I'm assured!

He—Why do you chatter so, prattle so?

She—Because of my doubt—
because I'm as positive as I am
that I sit here with my knees in a knot—
that that human creature—loves you.

He—Loves me?

She—And you her!

He—Minikin!

She—When she takes us down she holds you much
longer.

He—Minikin!

She—I'm sufficiently feminine—

MANIKIN AND MANIKIN

and certainly old enough—
I and my hundred and seventy years—
I can see, I can feel
by her manner of touching me
and her flicking me with her mop—
the creature hates me—
she'd like to drop me, that's what she would!

He—Minikin!

She—Don't you venture defending her!
Booby—you don't know live women!
When I'm in the right position
I can note how she fondles you,
pets you like a parrot with her finger tip,
blows a pinch of dust from your eye
with her softest breath,
holds you off at arm's length
and fixes you with her spider look,
actually holds you against her cheek—
her rose-tinted cheek—
before she releases you!
If she didn't turn us apart so often,
I wouldn't charge her with insinuation;
but now I know she loves you—
she's as jealous as I am—
and poor dead me in her live power!
Manikin?

He—Minikin?

She—If you could see me—
the way you see her—

He—But I see you—

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

see you always—
see only you!

She—If you could see me
the way you see her,
you'd still love me,
you'd love me the way you do her!
Who made me what I am?
Who dreamed me in motionless clay?

He—Minikin?

She—~~Manikin~~?

He—Will you listen to me?

She—No!

He—Will you listen to me?

She—No.

He—Will you listen to me?

She—Yes.

He—I love you—

She—No!

He—I've always loved you—

She—No.

He—You doubt that?

She—Yes!

He—You doubt that?

She—Yes.

He—You doubt that?

She—No.

You've always loved me—

yes—

but you don't love me now—

no—

MANIKIN AND MANIKIN

not since that rose-face encountered your
glance—

no.

He—Minikin!

She—If I could move about the way she can—

if I had feet—

dainty white feet which could twinkle and
twirl—

I'd dance you so prettily

you'd think me a sun butterfly—

if I could let down my hair

and prove you it's longer than larch hair—

if I could raise my black brows

or shrug my narrow shoulders,

like a queen or a countess—

if I could turn my head, tilt my head,

this way and that, like a swan—

ogle my eyes, like a peacock,

till you'd marvel,

they're green, nay, violet, nay, yellow, nay,
gold—

if I could move, only move

just the moment of an inch—

you would see what I could be!

It's a change, it's a change,

you men ask of women!

He—A change?

She—You're eye-sick, heart-sick

of seeing the same foolish porcelain thing,

a hundred years old,

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

a hundred and fifty,
and sixty, and seventy—
I don't know how old I am!

He—Not an exhalation older than I—
not an inhalation younger!
Minikin?

She—Manikin?

He—Will you listen to me?

She—No!

He—Will you listen to me?

She—No.

He—Will you listen to me?

She—Yes.

He—I don't love that creature—

She—You do.

He—I can't love that creature—

She—You can.

He—Will you listen to me?

She—Yes—

if you'll tell me—
if you'll prove me—
so my last particle of dust—
the tiniest speck of a molecule—
the merest electron—

He—Are you listening?

She—Yes!

He—To begin with—

I dislike, suspect, deplore—
I had best say, feel compassion

MANIKIN AND MANIKIN

for what is called, humanity—
or the animate, as opposed to the inanimate—

She—You say that so wisely—
you're such a philosopher—
say it again!

He—That which is able to move
can never be steadfast, you understand?
Let us consider the creature at hand
to whom you have referred
with an undue excess of admiration
adulterated with an undue excess of envy—

She—Say that again!

He—To begin with—

I can only see part of her at once.
She moves into my vision;
she moves out of my vision;
she is doomed to be wayward.

She—Yes, but that which you see of her—

He—Is ugly, commonplace, unsightly.

Her face a rose-face?

it's veined with blood and the skin of it
wrinkles—

her eyes are ever so near to a hen's—

her movements,

if one would pay such a gait with regard—

her gait is unspeakably ungainly—

her hair—

She—Her hair?

He—Luckily I've never seen it down—

I daresay it comes down in the dark,

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

when it looks, most assuredly, like tangled
weeds—

She—Again, Manikin, that dukcet phrase!

He—Even were she beautiful,
she were never so beautiful as thou!

She—Now you're a poet, Manikin!

He—Even were she so beautiful as thou—
lending her your eyes,
and the exquisite head which holds them—
like a cup two last beads of wine,
like a stone two last drops of rain,
green, nay, violet, nay, yellow, nay, gold—

She—Faster, Manikin!

He—I can't, Minikin!
Words were never given to man
to phrase such a one as you are—
inanimate symbols
can never embrace, embody, hold
the animate dream that you are—
I must cease.

She—Manikin!

He—And even were she so beautiful as thou,
she couldn't stay beautiful.

She—Stay beautiful?

He—Humans change with each going moment.
That is a gray-haired platitude.
Just as I can see that creature
only when she touches my vision,
so I could only see her once, were she beau-
tiful—

MANIKIN AND MANIKIN

at best, twice or thrice—

you're more precious than when you came!

She—And you!

He—Human pathos penetrates still deeper

when one determines their inner life,

as we've pondered their outer.

Their inner changes far more desperately.

She—How so, wise Manikin?

He—They have what philosophy terms, moods,
and moods are more pervious to modulation

than pools to idle breezes.

These people may say, to begin with—

I love you.

This may be true, I'm assured—

as true as when *we* say, I love you.

But they can only say,

I love you,

so long as the mood breathes,

so long as the breezes blow,

so long as water remains wet.

They are honest—

they mean what they say—

passionately, tenaciously, tragically—

but when the mood languishes,

they have to say,

if it be they are honest—

I do not love you.

Or they have to say,

I love you,

to somebody else.

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

She—To somebody else?

He—Now, you and I—
we've said that to each other—
we've had to say it
for a hundred and seventy years—
and we'll have to say it, always.

She—Say always again!

He—The life of an animate—

She—Say always again!

He—Always!

The life of an animate
is a procession of deaths
with but a secret sorrowing candle,
guttering lower and lower,
on the path to the grave—
the life of an inanimate
is as serenely enduring—
as all still things are.

She—Still things?

He—Recall our childhood in the English museum—
ere we were moved,
from place to place,
to this dreadful Yankee salon—
do you remember
that little old Greek tanagra
of the girl with a head like a bud—
that little old Roman medallion
of the girl with a head like a—

She—Manikin, Manikin—
were they so beautiful as I—

MANIKIN AND MANIKIN

did you love them, too—
why do you bring them back?

He—They were not so beautiful as thou—
I spoke of them—
recalled, designated them—
well, because they were ages old—
and—and—

She—And—and?

He—And we might live as long as they—
as they did and do!
I hinted their existence
because they're not so beautiful as thou,
so that by contrast and deduction—

She—And deduction?

He—You know what I'd say—

She—But say it again!

He—I love you.

She—Manikin?

He—Minikin?

She—Then even though that creature has turned us
apart,
can you see me?

He—I can see you.

She—Even though you haven't seen me
for hours, days, weeks—
with your dear blue eyes—
you can see me—
with your hidden ones?

He—I can see you.

She—Even though you are still,

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

and calm, and smooth,
and lovely outside—
you aren't still and calm
and smooth and lovely inside?

He—Lovely, yes—

but not still and calm and smooth!

She—Which way are you looking? What do you
see?

He—I look at you.

I see you.

She—And if that fool of a servant—

oh, Manikin—

suppose she should break the future—

our great, happy centuries ahead—

by dropping me, throwing me down?

He—I should take an immediate step

off this everlasting shelf—

She—But you cannot move!

He—The good wind would give me a blow!

She—Now you're a punster!

And what would your fragments do?

He—They'd do what Manikin did.

She—Say that again!

He—They'd do what Manikin did. . . .

She—Manikin?

He—Minikin?

She—Shall I tell you something?

He—Tell me something.

She—Are you listening?

He—With my inner ears.

MANIKIN AND MANIKIN

She—I wasn't jealous of that woman—

He—You weren't jealous?

She—I wanted to hear you talk—

He—You wanted to hear me talk?

She—You talk so wonderfully!

He—Do I, indeed? What a booby I am!

She—And I wanted to hear you say—

He—You cheat, you idler, you—

She—Woman—

He—Dissembler!

She—Manikin?

He—Minikin?

She—Everlastingly?

He—Everlastingly.

She—Say it again!

He—I refuse—

She—You refuse?

He—Well—

She—Well?

He—You have ears outside your head—

I'll say that for you—

but they'll never hear—

what your other ears hear!

She—Say it—

down one of the ears—

outside my head?

He—I refuse.

She—You refuse?

He—Leave me alone.

She—Manikin?

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

He—I can't say it!

She—Manikin!

*(The clock goes on ticking for a moment. Its mel-
low chimes strike the hour. Curtain.)*

PEOPLE WHO DIE

(A Dream-Play)

PEOPLE WHO DIE

A DREAM-PLAY

(A man and a woman are sitting on a bench in front of a curtain—they might be 35 years old. She is leaning against his shoulder and looking at a tablet which rests on his lap. He is moving his pencil idly over the tablet.)

He—I should like to write a play about death,
but it must not have people in it.
It must have people in it,
but not people who die.
It must have death in it,
but the death must not touch
people who die.

She—Such a play would not be a tragedy.

He—The death must touch
the people who die in people—
nay, the people who die between people.

She—Such a play might be a tragedy.

He—The play, then, must not have people in it—
people do not act in plays—
what is between them acts in plays—
the people between them—
they act in plays.

This is always the way of the plot:

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

people are alone:
people seek each other:
people come of the seeking:
of the finding, asking, giving:
it is they who act in plays:
it is they who die.

She—You would write the play about them?

He—Nay, I should like the play to be my play,
the people, my people!

She—Nay, I should like the play to be my play,
the people, my people!

He—Nay, the people, our people, the play, our play!

She—Such a play would be a comedy!

He—Will you do the other part?

(*A gong sounds gently.*)

She—Sh! Begin!

There goes the curtain call!

(*The curtain spreads part way. A second curtain, or drapery, old rose in color, is disclosed, and a young man and a young woman—they might be 20 years old. Rapid dialogue.*)

He—My thought of you—

is—is like a rainbow—

it—it is an iris—

no—it is a peacock—

She—Why isn't it like a rainbow?

He—It's like a rainbow—

and it isn't like a rainbow—

it's a rainbow when you can see a rainbow—

not a rainbow when a rainbow is gone.

PEOPLE WHO DIE

She—Why isn't it an iris?

He—It—it is an iris—

and it—it isn't an iris—

it's an iris when an iris holds her bloom like
a lady—

not an iris when she's old and faint and faded.

She—Then it's a peacock?

He—It isn't a peacock—

it's a peacock when a peacock opens his tail
eyes—

and each eye sees you in its own way—

whatever the color and shape of it—

it isn't a peacock when he shuts his head eyes—
and brings all the others back to sleep.

She—Then your thought of me changes?

He—It doesn't change!

It—it's more like an opal—

yes—it's more like an opal—

She—Doesn't an opal change?

He—The water in an opal moves—

the quicksilver quavers—

the music undulates—

but the stone, the stone—

the stone of an opal is still—

it's the stone of an opal!

She—Your thought of me?

He—My thought of you!

She—And I?

He—You?

She—What am I?

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

He—You? Why—
you are what I've been saying of you—
you—I can't say what you are—
you—are more than my thought of you—
deeper, higher, more colorful, beautiful, still—

She—Oh!

He—Oh?

She—I want your thought to be like me—
I—I want to be like your thought—
you—you are holding us apart—
me—and your thought of me!

He—No!

She—No? You—
how shall I know you love me—
you love what you think of me!

He—I do not—
I—see here!
What is your thought of me
if it isn't like my thought of you?

She—My thought of you—
is—is like a zebra—
it—it has big stripes in it—
big stripes of faith—

He—You stutter just as I do!

She—It—it isn't like a leopard—
the spots never change—

He—You have two spots in your head—
they change—

She—They do not—

He—They change me!

PEOPLE WHO DIE

She—You change?

He—From happy to happier to happiest to most happiest!

She—Come back!

He—You'll have to bring me!

(*She kisses him.*)

She—Are you back again?

He—From most happiest to happiest to happier to happy.

She—Only happy?

He—Don't send me off again!

(*She holds him.*)

He—Have you got me?

She—I hope so.

He—Then don't you look at me!

She—You!

He—You!

She—Rainbow—

He—Zebra—

She—Peacock—

He—Leopard—

She—I'll eat you.

He—Eat away!

She—Tail and all!

He—Don't forget the stone!

She—I can't eat the stone?

He—Swallow it!

She—It will kill me?

He—I hope so.

She—You!

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

He—You!

(The curtain closes abruptly. After a pause, the woman speaks slowly.)

She—That was fifteen years ago.

He—That was fifteen years ago.

She—And they are dead.

He—And they are dead.

She—Two marionnettes!

He—Not marionnettes!

She—Two dear little people.

He—Two dear little people.

She—Why did they die?

He—Don't disturb the plot—

let them show the way they died.

*She—I don't want to see any more—
it's a tragedy—*

He—Tragedy there, but a comedy here!

She—They are dead.

He—They are alive.

She—Poor dear little people.

He—Rich dear little people.

She—They were kind.

He—They were kind.

She—Little grandfather.

He—Little grandmother.

She—You.

He—You.

She—I don't want to see any more.

(The gong sounds again.)

He—Sh! Behave!

PEOPLE WHO DIE

There goes the curtain call!

(The curtain spreads part way. A third curtain, or drapery, gray in color, is disclosed, and a young man and a young woman—they might be 25 years old. Moderato dialogue.)

He—And what do you see now?

She—The image isn't the same.

He—And only a moment ago—

She—I looked just then

like a gargoyle in a tree,

I looked just now

like a pixy or a dwarf.

He—And only a moment ago,

you looked like a child seeing light?

What made the water move?

She—The wind made the water move—

the wind sent a child-like breeze—

the breeze blew

like a child blowing a bubble,

just before the bubble has gone too far.

He—And all is still down there again?

She—Still down there, but not in me.

He—Why isn't it still in you?

She—You know why.

He—Where did the child of the wind come from?

She—Outside.

He—You didn't make the water move?

She—I didn't make the water move.

He—I didn't make the water move?

She—You didn't make the water move.

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

He—Look again.

Sha—I am looking.

He—All is still down there?

She—Still down there, but not in me.

He—What has happened to the wind outside?

She—The wind outside flew away,
and left a child of itself in me,
and the twin child—

He—The twin child?

She—You have the twin child in you.

He—I have not—

She—You have—

dear—

you must not lie—

we must not lie—

you agreed, we must not lie.

He—I agreed, we must not lie.

She—What has happened to me has happened to
you—

I am not alone in this?

He—You are not alone in this.

She—You look again.

He—I am looking.

She—What do you see now?

He—The image of myself.

She—The image?

He—Myself.

She—What do you look like?

He—I don't want to look—

I don't want to see.

PEOPLE WHO DIE

She—You said you would look.

He—I said I would.

She—And we said we would be honest.

He—We said we would.

She—Now you want to turn away.

He—It hurts to look at oneself.

She—Even for us?

He—Even for us.

She—We will never be able to see,
unless you see yourself, and I myself.

He—And I tell you what I see.

She—And I tell you what I see.

He—You will never be able to see me
till I tell you what I see.

She—Now you are brave—
you have said it at last.

He—You are braver than I.

She—Heretofore—

He—Ah, heretofore—

She—We were dishonest—

He—We weren't dishonest—

She—We weren't dishonest—
but we saw only what we tried to see—
I looked only at you and you at me—
and I only looked at you by looking at myself.

He—And I at me.

She—And I told you what I saw in me was you—
so—
when a breeze came,
and a second breeze,

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

and a wind, and a wind, and a wind—

He—And a wind, and a wind, and a wind—

She—I no longer saw you in me—
you in me vanished.

He—And you in me.

She—Look at me in the pool.

He—I won't look.

She—Be brave.

He—I can't be.

She—I'll look at you in the pool?

He—I will look.

She—Lean farther this way—
bring your head closer—
what do you see?

He—You.

She—No?

He—My image of you.

She—Sit up—
shut your eyes—
what do you see now?

He—I see a pool.

She—Where is the pool?

He—Down in me.

She—Does the water move?

He—The water moves.

She—Why does it move?

He—I see you there.

She—You see the image you saw outside—
you mustn't see that—
if it weren't there the water wouldn't move!

PEOPLE WHO DIE

He—I know.

She—You must see yourself!

He—I can't see myself if I don't see you!

She—That is where the shadow moves!

 If it would only die!

He—What shall we do?

She—I don't know.

He—I want to open my eyes.

She—Don't, don't!

He—It is dark!

 I am afraid!

She—You must be brave.

He—Give me your hand.

She—Here.

He—Where is it?

She—There.

He—If the shadow would only die!

She—Be brave,
 and it will die.

He—I begin to see myself—

She—What do you see?

He—I only begin to see—

She—Look, look—
 and tell me what you see!

He—I wish you would look for me!

She—I cannot—

 I must not—
 tell me what you see?

He—I cannot—

 I still see—

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

what I am trying to see!

She—Me?

He—You. Oh—

give me yet a while—
the length of a breeze—
the last breeze—
to be brave?

She—I will.

He—The last breeze is so soft—
so beautiful—
and clear water so cruel.

She—And will you tell me?

He—As soon as I can see.

She—Then here is the last breeze.

(She caresses him quickly. He opens his eyes. He caresses her. She opens her eyes.)

He—Gargoyle—

She—Child—

He—Pixy—

She—Child.

(The curtain closes abruptly. After a pause, the woman speaks excitedly.)

She—That was ten years ago.

He—More or less.

She—How could she—
how dare she be so cruel?

He—She was brave.

There's no bravery like cruelty.

She—She had a poniard in her—
she stabbed him with it—

PEOPLE WHO DIE

how he bled, how he died—

He—As brave a human—

She—He?

He—She!

She made him see himself—
he who would look at her—
there's no bravery like that—

She—What did he see?

He—You know what he saw—
you mustn't disturb the plot.

She—I don't want any plot,
I don't want any play—
tell me what he saw!

He—The surest way to life is art—

She—I don't want to see life,
I don't want to see art—
tell me what he saw!

He—You know what he saw—
if you don't you're still—
you're an owl in the sun!

She—I know—
he saw the most beautiful—
the most courageous—
the most patient—

He—Superlative hyperbole—
three lies in succession—
lies have no part in real life?

She—I'm not lying—

He—Sh!

She—It's you who would lie—

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

He—Sh!

She—He saw—

he saw—

he still sees—

he still sees—

He—Be still!

(The gong sounds again.)

He—There goes the curtain call!

She—I don't want your dumb play—

it's horrible—I want—

He—We can't hold curtains

for you and your wants—

She—I want—

He—Be still!

She—Stupid old play!

He—Sh!

(The curtain spreads part way. A fourth curtain, or drapery, blue in color, is disclosed, and a young man and a young woman—they might be 30 years old.)

He—I know a shell,

a plain white shell,

I like to hold to my ear.

Perhaps it tells something

in no phrase different

from the talk of other shells;

perhaps it isn't kin

to sea sand

or white clouds;

perhaps it is only

PEOPLE WHO DIE

myself I hear there.

But I know a shell,

a plain white shell,

I like to hold to my ear.

She—What a quaint soft tune!

And where is the shell?

Is it this one?

He—That has three coral veins in it—

one touch of red, and the white is gone!

She—Is it this one?

He—That has a speck, a blue speck—

like a white dream doubted.

She—Is it this—

this is a white?

He—That is a white,

but not the white of the tune.

She—Where is the shell you know?

Didn't the sea bring it in?

He—The sea didn't bring it.

She—How could you find it—

sea shells come from the sea?

He—This isn't a sea shell.

She—Then you didn't find it here?

He—I found it here.

She—You know a shell,

a plain white shell,

you like to hold to your ear.

It must be outside of you?

He—Because I can see myself.

She—What has that to do with hearing?

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

He—The roar inside must subside
ere I can see myself, and hear.

She—The roar inside?

He—The roar of you.

She—We were two oceans?

He—We were.

She—And what are we now?

He—Two people,
each with a shell to his ear.

She—Perhaps it tells something
in no phrase different
from the talk of other shells.
What does that say to you?

He—Shells all tell the same tale
after they have left the ocean.

She—Ours have left the ocean?

He—Utterly.

She—He taught them their tale?

He—He did.

She—What did he tell them?

He—He said,
I am alone—
he said,
there is another, alone as I—
he said,
tell that other, I am alone—
he said,
ask that other, is she alone?—
he said,
tell that other,

PEOPLE WHO DIE

I am she, and she is I—

he said,

ask that other—

She—Ask that other?

He—Whether I lie?

She—She said,

tell that other,

he does not lie.

He—Perhaps it isn't kin—

She—To sea sand

or white clouds.

What does that say to you?

He—Sea sand

and white clouds

go away.

She—What makes them move?

He—The water in them.

She—Shells do not move?

He—Shells do not move.

She—They came from the oceans?

Oceans are water?

He—The oceans were still—

and so, then, the tale

they gave to the shells.

She—A tale is very delicate!

He—And indestructible!

She—Perhaps it is only

myself I hear there—

He—Perhaps it is only

myself I hear there.

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

She—A quaint soft tune!

Has your stillness

another to sing to me?

He—One plus one plus one plus—

She—I'll give you

green kelp for laurel cap?

He—Wear it round your neck.

Are you ready?

She—I am.

He—Hold the shell to your ear.

She—This one?

He—No, that one.

She—Which one?

He—Your hand.

She—Which hand?

He—Either.

She—The other would be lonesome?

He—Give it to me.

Are you ready?

She—Yes, hurry.

He—Close it tight or a breeze will slip in!

She—Simpleton—

sprite—

fish—

dolphin—

He—Do you worship—

She—Wait, I must listen!

Now! Come!

He—Do you worship a sea

to which you can never be more

PEOPLE WHO DIE

than a stone for melting into sand?

It is greater than revenge!

Are you carving a pebble,
one foolish white pebble,
the waves cannot reach?

It is greater than silence,
a thing to scorn dissolution,
a greater tomb than mountains!

She—That is a queer, a terrible tune.

He—Queer, not terrible.

She—Is it the same sea, the same?

He—The same two seas.

She—And the pebble—
you are the pebble!

He—And you.

She—Oh!

He—Oh?

She—Let's throw pebbles to each other—
there are millions of pebbles here!

He—Throw pebbles?

She—Toss them—
ever so gently—
let's play we are pebbles—
and toss them—
like rainbow curves—
or an ellipse of the moon—
or arc of fountain streams!

He—Sh—
some of them might fall!

She—I don't care—

PLAYS FOR POEM-MIMES

there are others—
millions of them—
let's play we are pebbles—
even unto the last one—
our tomb—
the tomb pebble!

He—Nymph—
sea-urchin—
mollusc—

She—Pebble!

He—Pebble!

(They begin to toss imaginary pebbles with varied exclamations. The curtain closes abruptly. After a pause, the woman speaks dreamily.)

She—I am tired,
very sleepy—

He—That was five years ago.

She—I am very tired,
very sleepy—

He—That was five years ago.

She—Put your tablet away—
let it rest—

He—I should like to write a play about life,
this play is too much like a dream.

I should like to write the play about life,
but it must not have people in it,
people are too much like a dream.

She—Oh—

He—It must have people in it,
but not people who live.

PEOPLE WHO DIE

It must have a dream in it,
but the dream must not touch
people who live.

She—Oh—

I am so sleepy—
my head is so sleepy—

He—The life must touch
the people who dream in people—
nay, the people—

She—The people—

He—The people—

She—Where is your arm—
do you love me?—
put it about me.

He—Where is yours—
do you love me?—
put yours about me.

She—Are you tired?

He—I am tired.

She—Shut your eyes.

He—Shut your eyes.

(Gradually, they fall into a doze. Gradually, the curtain opens part way. The scene is fairly dark, but the outlines of two shadows may be discerned. They speak in lively echo-whispers.)

He—Hello, dream!

She—Hello, dream!

He—What are you doing here?

She—What are you doing here?

He—Why did you go away?



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